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Pescarini, Diego ; Donzelli, Giulia

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# **Concealed pseudo-clefts? Evidence from a Lombard dialect\***

Diego Pescarini and Giulia Donzelli

CNRS and Universität Zürich

*Abstract:* This paper focuses on the syntax of clefts in the Lombard dialect of Comun Nuovo (Bergamo). In this dialect, clefts are highly constrained (in particular, they are ungrammatical in questions) and, in the contexts where clefts and pseudo-clefts alternate, the distinction between the two is often blurred. We argue that Comunuovese clefts are better analysed as concealed pseudo-clefts (Paul 2001 a.o.).

*Key words:* clefts, pseudo-clefts, northern Italian dialects, interrogatives

## **1. Introduction**

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\* To Leonardo, tireless explorer of linguistic wonders. For helpful comments and suggestions, we wish to thank the audience of CIDSIM 12 (Cambridge, 3-5 July 2017). Although the paper is the product of a constant collaboration, Giulia Donzelli takes responsibility for sections 1, 3-4 and Diego Pescarini for sections 2, 5-6.

The paper investigates the syntax of clefts and pseudo-clefts in the dialect of Comun Nuovo (hereafter, CN).<sup>1</sup> Since in CN clefts are highly constrained, we argue that they are better analysed as (a kind of) pseudo-clefts (in the spirit of Percus 1997; Paul 2001 a.o.).

The structure of the paper is the following: §2 introduces a simplified taxonomy of clefts and pseudo-clefts and, through a comparison of CN and Italian data, highlights some peculiarities of CN clefts; §3 deals with interrogation in CN, while §4 focuses on cleft interrogatives; §5 elaborates on some theoretical consequences; §6 concludes.

## **2. Types of clefts**

Clefts are focus constructions in which the copula introduces a focalised XP (on Italian, see Sornicola 1988; Salvi 1991). Following Belletti 2008, we assume that the XP is extracted from a (small) CP, see (1). Pseudo-clefts, by contrast, are copular constructions in which the subordinate clause is a Relative Clause (RC), either headless or headed. In the former case, we obtain so-called *wh*-(pseudo)-clefts of the type *what he likes more is money* (in Italian, *wh*-pseudo-clefts are rare as headless RCs are seldom introduced by *wh* elements). In the latter case, see (2), the RC is introduced by a D element

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<sup>1</sup> For a corpus-based study on Bergamasco, see Valentini (2012).

or a generic noun, e.g. *the thing that, the person that*, etc., giving rise to so-called *th*-(pseudo)-clefts (Collins 1991).

- (1) a It is *money* [<sub>small CP</sub> that he wants ~~money~~]  
       b è *il denaro* [<sub>small CP</sub> che vuole ~~il denaro~~]
- (2) a Money is [<sub>headed RC</sub> *the thing* he wants ~~the thing~~]  
       b Il denaro è [<sub>headed RC</sub> *ciò* che vuole ~~ciò~~]

In what follows, we focus on the comparison between clefts and *th*-pseudo-clefts. It is worth noting that in many Romance languages the distinction between the two is almost blurred because both may exhibit the same word order, e.g. *copula XP CP/RC*. Despite their similarity, however, clefts and pseudo-clefts differ under several respects. First, in Italian, pseudo-clefts are not necessarily corrective and, in fact, can be used as answers, see (3a). By contrast, clefts often yield a corrective interpretation – save for cases in which the subject is focalised – and, therefore, are slightly degraded as answers to a question, see (3b):

- (3) - chi hai salutato?  
       ‘who did you greet?’  
       a È Carlo quello che ho salutato  
       It.is Carlo the.one that I.have greeted

b #È Carlo che ho salutato

It.is Carlo that I.have greeted

‘It is that book that I gave to Mario’

Second, while clefts allow the extraction of PPs from the embedded clause,

(4)a, *th*-pseudo-clefts cannot have the form \*[PP *be* RC], see (4)b:<sup>2</sup>

(4) a È a Giulia *che* ho prestato il mio libro

it.is to G. that I.have lent the my book

b È (\*a) Giulia *la persona a cui* ho dato il mio libro

it.is (to) G. the person to whom I.have lent the my book

Surprisingly, CN differs from Italian under both respects. First, clefts are not necessarily corrective. For instance, a cleft such as (5)b is a fine answer to a *wh* question:

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect, locative PPs are more complicated than other PPs since they can in fact occur in a copular construction along with a RC, e.g.

(i) È (a) Milano *il posto* che amo

it.is (in) Milan the place that I.love

However, (i) has only a locative interpretation, i.e. ‘the place is *in* Milan’, not the identificational interpretation characterising pseudo-clefts, i.e. ‘the place *is* Milan’.

(5) Q: Cosa t' et dacc al Mario?

What you= have given to.the Mario

'what did you give to Mario?'

A: a l'è chel liber lé che g o dacc<sup>3</sup>

*a*=it=is that book there that to.him= I.have given

'It is that book that I gave to him'

Second, in CN not only pseudo-clefts, but also clefts cannot have a PP in focus, cf. the following Italian/CN pair:

(6) a È da Luca che ho mangiato ieri It.

b \*a l'è da Luca che ho mangiat ier CN

*a*=it=is at Luca's that I.have eaten yesterday

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<sup>3</sup> The behaviour of the particle *a* in Lombard dialects is a well-known puzzle that cannot be addressed here for space limits. For the sake of clarity, in the glosses we try to distinguish the particle *a*, which occurs before subject clitics under certain pragmatic conditions, from the prosthetic vowel *a-* that syllabifies the 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject clitic. Crucially, the two are in complementary distribution (\**a al*); our glosses reflect the intuition of speakers.

The same particle, which arguably derives from a pronominal form (Lat. EGO 'I?') is attested in several northern Italian dialects with various functions/interpretations, some of which are related to information structure; for a syntactic analysis of the particle *a* in Paduan, see Benincà 1983/1994).

The ban on PP-clefts in CN is quite puzzling under the usual focus-analysis of clefts, in which the Focus position is category-neutral.

The third puzzle about CN clefts regards interrogatives, as it turns out that cleft interrogatives are often ruled out in CN, while pseudo-clefts are always grammatical. This restriction is rather surprising as clefting is normally regarded as a common interrogation strategy in northern Italo-Romance (Poletto & Vanelli 1997 a.o.).

(7) a Chi é-l \*(chel) che (a)l dorma?

Who is=it the.one that he= sleeps

b Chi é-l \*(chel) che t-é vest?

Who is=it the.one that you=have seen

The following sections illustrate some properties of CN interrogatives and focus on the interplay of clefting and interrogation.

### **3. An aside on interrogatives in CN**

CN interrogatives are characterised by residual subject clitic inversion. Inversion is forbidden in yes/no questions and, in wh questions, is restricted to present-tense clauses with a deictic temporal interpretation such as (8)a.

Conversely, enclisis cannot co-occur with present forms with a futurate or habitual interpretation such as (8)b or with past/future tenses, see (8)c.

- (8) a ndo core-l?  
 where is.running=he  
 ‘Where is he running?’
- b ndo al cor a nedal/töcc i martedì sira?  
 where he= runs at Christmas/every Tuesday evening  
 ‘Where does he run?’
- c ndo al-ha corìt/corerà?  
 where he=has run/will.run  
 ‘Where did/will he run?’

The second main feature of CN interrogatives is the occurrence of different classes of *wh* elements, each exhibiting a peculiar syntactic behaviour (see Manzini & Savoia 2011 for similar data on Lombard dialects). For instance, the *wh* corresponding to ‘what’ has three possible forms: [sa], ['kɔza], and [ko'zɛ]. [sa] belongs to the class of clitic *wh* elements (in the terms of Poletto 2000; Poletto & Pollock 2006; but see Manzini & Savoia 2011 and Manzini 2014); clitic *wh* elements in CN can co-occur with subject clitic inversion; ['kɔza] never triggers inversion and occurs either *in* or *ex situ*; [ko'zɛ], by contrast, cannot be fronted.



The interplay between clitic inversion, *in/ex situ* placement, and various kinds of *wh* items gives rise to several patterns of interrogation that, for space limits, cannot be discussed here (see Donzelli 2017).

#### 4. Cleft interrogatives

This section deals with the distribution of clefts among different types of interrogative clauses. For the sake of clarity, we distinguish three types of interrogatives: *what/who* interrogatives, where a bare DP is interrogated; temporal interrogatives, where a Measure Phrase (MP) is interrogated, and other types of interrogatives.

##### 4.1 *who/what interrogatives*

CN permits the interrogation of pseudo-clefts, whereas cleft interrogatives are not possible.

- (9) a Chi é-l \*(chèl) che l è dre a durmì? *who-S*  
       who is=he the.one that he=is sleeping
- b Chi é-l \*(chèl) che ta set dre ad ardà? *who-O*  
       who is=he that that you= are watching
- c Cos é-l \*(chèl) che ta manget? *what-O*

what is=it that that you= eat

It is worth noting that pseudo-clefts do not behave like plain *wh* interrogatives. First, they do not allow *wh* in situ and always exhibit inversion, even if the fronted *wh* element is not clitic, cf. *cos* in (9)c. With past or future tenses, where inversion is not permitted, pseudo-clefts are degraded, see (11).

(10) Chi \*l'è/é-l chèl che l è dre a durmì?

who he=is/is=he the.one that he=is sleeping

(11) ?Cosa l éra chèl che ta séret dre a mangià?

what it=was that that you= were eating

#### 4.2 Temporal interrogatives

Temporal clefts exhibit a peculiar behaviour as the temporal Measure Phrase can occur as either a DP or a PP (see Benincà 1978 on Italian). In the former case, the copula may agree in number with the MP. In these respects, Italian and CN do not differ. It is worth noting that in CN, as well as in most northern Italian dialects, number agreement is marked on the subject clitic (cf. *(a)l* (sg) vs *i/j* (pl) in (12)b), whereas the third and sixth person of the verb are identical:

- (12) a l'è (da) tre ure che ta spete/so dre a spetat  
 it=is (for) three hours that you= I.wait/have.been.waiting  
 b a l/j'è (\*da) tre ure che ta spete  
 a=it/they=is (for) three hours that you= I.have.been.waiting

Simple *wh* elements such as *quand(o)* ‘when’ and *quat* ‘how long’ always exhibit clitic inversion, even in the contexts in which inversion is normally banned, i.e. with past/future tenses, cf. (13)c:

- (13) a Quand é-l/\*l è che ta egnet a troam?  
 When is=it/it=is that you= come to meet=me  
 b Quat é-l/\*a l è che ta lauret in svisera?  
 How.long is=it/a=it=is that you= work in Switzerland  
 c Quat ere-l/\*a l era che ta lauraet in svisera?  
 How.long was=it/a=it=was that you= worked in Switzerland

Conversely, complex *wh* elements such as *quace agn* ‘how many years’ do not trigger inversion.

#### 4.3 Other interrogatives

The remaining wh elements, e.g. *when*, *how*, *why*, etc. cannot occur in clefts.

The following examples illustrate the contrast between CN and Italian:

(14) a \*Ndo      é-l      che l va?      (CN)

b Dov'      è      che va?      (It.)

Where is=(it) that (he)=goes

(15) a \*Com'      é-l      che al noda? (CN)

b Com'      è      che nuota? (It.)

How is=(it) that he=swims

## 5. Summary and theoretical implications

The following table summarises the distribution of clefts in CN. Recall that, although clefts are permitted in declarative clauses, they do not yield a corrective interpretation and do not allow the focalisation of PPs.

(16)

Focus:	Declarative	wh Interrogative
DP	✓	✗
MP (temporal)	✓	✓
Others	✗	✗

Temporal clefts, by contrast, are always permitted, even in questions. It is worth noting that the behaviour of inversion sets apart temporal clefts from other types of clefts. The occurrence of inversion with any tense in combination with (simple) temporal *wh* elements points towards a separate analysis of temporal clefts. In a nutshell, we are going to argue that temporal clefts are in fact the only true clefts of CN, while other *prima facie* clefts are better analysed as concealed pseudo-clefts.

Leaving temporal clefts aside, the data introduced so far challenge an analysis of clefts in terms of focus-movement. If clefting was a focalisation strategy, all kinds of XP would be expected to occur in clefts and no declarative/interrogative asymmetry should occur, *contra* evidence. To account for the observed restrictions, we argue for an alternative analysis, according to which in some languages clefts and pseudo-clefts have the same structure (Paul 2001 a.o.; see also Percus 1997).

Let us assume that pseudo-clefts are equative copular constructions, i.e. a Small Clause (Heycock & Kroch 1999: 381–382) headed by an equative head (=), which takes a headed Relative Clause as its complement.

(17) [SC DP = [RC DP ...]]

The equative head establishes an identity relation between the subject of the SC and the head of the RC, e.g.

(18) è [<sub>SC</sub> Luca = [<sub>RC</sub> quello che ho baciato ~~quello~~ ]]

‘Luca is the one that I kissed’

The equative relation holds if and only if the subject of the SC and the head of the RC have the same categorial features, thus ruling out cases like (19):

(19) [<sub>SC</sub> \*PP = [<sub>RC</sub> DP ...]]

This explains why PPs cannot occur in pseudo-clefts with a specificational reading (recall that, when locative PPs are allowed in a copular construction as in (20)c, they can have only a locative interpretation, i.e. ‘the place is *in* Milan’, and not ‘the Place *is* Milan’, see fn 2):

(20) a \*è      con Luca    il ragazzo con cui mi sposo

it.is   with L.      the boy that I marry

b \*è      a matita    il modo in cui disegno

it.is   with pencil the way in which I draw

c \*è      a Milano    il posto in cui vado

it.is   in Milan    the place where I go

‘the place where I go is Milan’

With this in mind, let us suppose that in CN clefts are concealed pseudo-clefts: they do not result from extraction from a (small) CP à *la* Belletti, see

(1), but from an equative SC like (17). Under this analysis, we can easily account for the ungrammaticality of PP clefts, which in CN are as ungrammatical as pseudoclefts because of the constraint in (19) (the same holds for *wh* elements corresponding to PP arguments/adjuncts, cf. §4.3).

By the same token, *prima facie* clefts such as (21) are therefore supposed to derive from a copular structure like (22), once the head of the RC (*chel* ‘that’) is deleted:

(21) A l’è ol Luca che l’ha mangiat la turta

*a=it=is the L. that he=ate the cake*

(22) A l’è [<sub>SC</sub> ol Luca = [<sub>RC</sub> (*chel*) che l’ha mangiat la turta]]

*a=it=is the L. that that ate the cake*

To derive (21) from (22), one has to resort to a mechanism of deletion (not dissimilar from the one invoked for the analysis of relative clauses since Chomsky 1977), in which the head of the RC is deleted under identity with the subject of the SC (for an alternative machinery, see Percus 1997).

However, following this analysis, one wonders why deletion does not take place in interrogatives, where only pseudo-clefts are allowed (the relevant examples are repeated below for the sake of clarity).

(23) a Chi é-l \*(chël) che l’è dre a durmì? *who-S*

who is=he that that he=is sleeping

b Chi é-l \*(chèl) che ta set dre ad ardà? *who-O*

who is=he that that you= are watching

c Cos é-l \*(chèl) che ta manget? *what-O*

what is=it that that you= eat

We contend that deletion is blocked as the featural specifications of the equated XPs do not correspond: if the subject of the SC bears a [+WH] (or Q) specification, we hypothesise that deletion cannot take place, thus giving rise to the observed asymmetry between declaratives, where pseudo-clefts are finally turned into *prima facie* clefts, and interrogatives, where the head of the RC cannot be omitted:

(24) Chi é-l [<sub>SC</sub> ~~chi~~ [<sub>RC</sub> \*(chèl) che l'è dre a durmì]]?

who is=he the.one that he=is sleeping

The above solution might sound rather *ad hoc*. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that similar declarative/interrogative asymmetries are found in Italian as well and, to the best of our knowledge, have remained unnoticed so far. Let us start with the minimal pair in (25): the two sentences have the same meaning and the same information structure; in the former, the PP is extracted from the subordinate clause, whereas in the latter a DP element co-occurs along with an oblique wh element (*con cui* ‘with whom’).



- (25) a È con Giorgio che voglio scappare  
           it.is with G. that I want to escape  
       b ?È Giorgio con cui voglio scappare.  
           it.is G. with whom I want to escape

Benincà (1978: fn. 2) points out that sentences like (25)b are slightly degraded and, instead of (25)b, a pseudo-cleft such as (26) is normally preferred.

- (26) È Giorgio quello con cui voglio scappare  
           it.is G. the.one with whom I want to escape

Interestingly, the slight asymmetry noticed by Benincà becomes a full contrast once the sentences in (25) are turned into questions: the former remains grammatical, while the latter results in severe ungrammaticality.

- (27) a con chi è \_ che vuoi scappare?  
           with whom is that you want to escape  
       b \*Chi è \_ con cui vuoi scappare?  
           Who is with whom you want to escape

Again, (27)b is fine if we resort to a pseudo-cleft construction:

(28) Chi è \_ quello con cui vuoi scappare?

Who is the.one with whom you want to escape

In the light of the analysis of CN, we argue that the sentences in (25) and (27) are not of the same kind: (25)a and (27)a are fully-fledged clefts, whereas (25)b and (27)b are concealed pseudo-clefts of the CN type. Underlyingly, they are copular constructions in which the head of the RC has been deleted:

(29) È [SC Giorgio = [RC ~~quello~~ con cui voglio scappare]]

Like in CN, the head of the RC cannot be deleted if the subject of the SC is interrogated:

(30) Chi è [SC \_ = [RC \*(quello) con cui voglio scappare]]

This is why only fully-fledged pseudo-clefts such as (25)a can occur in questions, while concealed pseudo-clefts such as (25)b cannot.

## 6. Conclusions

This contribution has focused on the syntax of clefts in the Lombard dialect of Comun Nuovo (Bergamo). We have shown that in this dialect clefts are highly constrained and, in the contexts where clefts and pseudo-clefts alternate, the distinction between the two is often blurred.

In particular, clefts are ungrammatical in questions, save for temporal clefts which, however, exhibit a puzzling behaviour with respect to inversion (inversion normally occurs with certain types of *wh* elements and in sentences with a deictic present tense).

Leaving temporal clefts aside, we contend that CN clefts are better analysed as concealed pseudo-clefts, an analysis put forth for other non-European languages (see Paul 2001 and references therein). We do not claim that the usual raising analysis of clefts must be always replaced by a pseudo-cleft analysis, but we point out that the divide between clefts and pseudo-clefts is far less straightforward than usually thought and that the boundary between the two analyses is ultimately an empirical matter.

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